

ABSTRACT

DISSERTATION: Everyday Stranger Harassment and Coping among Asian Indian and U.S.

Students

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In this project, the researcher investigated the impact of everyday stranger harassment (ESH) on body shame, body surveillance, control beliefs, and fear of rape among U.S. and Asian Indian female college students. Strategies used by women to cope with ESH also were examined. The project consisted of a pilot and main study. In the pilot study, relying on the Systematic Test of Equivalence Procedure (STEP), feedback was sought from experts who had experience conducting research in India in the area of ESH. Results indicated that self-report surveys and Likert response formats can be utilized in India with college students. Expert feedback also was used to linguistically modify items on the scales administered and add new items to the Coping with ESH scale. Employing these two sets of procedures helped to improve the overall validity of the instruments so that they were relevant in the Asian Indian cultural setting. In the main study, 250 U.S. and 259 Asian Indian college students were recruited. Results revealed that there were no differences in the frequency with which U.S. and Asian Indian participants experienced ESH. Additionally, among U.S. participants, passive coping with ESH moderated the relationship between verbal pressure (evaluative verbal comments from strangers) and body shame (feeling ashamed about one's body because it does not match cultural standards of

beauty). In the Asian Indian population, passive coping with ESH mediated the relationship of verbal pressure with body control beliefs (the degree of perceived control over one's appearance) and body shame. In both the U.S. and Asian Indian samples, verbal pressure had an indirect, positive relationship with fear of rape (fear of being victimized by stranger rape) via body shame. The findings of the main study highlight the direct and indirect relationship of verbal pressure on body shame and fear of rape. All of the results are discussed in terms of prior research on ESH, facets of the U.S. and India culture, objectification theory, and the shadow hypothesis. Implications for theory, research, and practice also are presented.

Keywords: Everyday Stranger Harassment, objectification theory, coping, cross-cultural study, sexual objectification, shadow hypothesis